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Press Releases :: *March 24, 2010*

Members Question Changes to NASA's Exploration Program

(Washington, DC) –The **House Committee on Science and Technology's Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics** held a **hearing** today to discuss the Administration's proposed changes to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) exploration program. Key proposed changes that were discussed included the cancellation of the Constellation Program, investment in a new "commercial crew" space transport industry, and a variety of implications resulting from the Administration's proposals.

"I have called this hearing today because we have a serious issue to address—the future of America's human space flight program—and we need to get it right," said **Subcommittee Chairwoman Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ)**.

Members were particularly concerned by questions left unanswered by NASA's FY 2011 budget request. While NASA has provided its overall rationale for moving in another direction, the proposed change in the agency's exploration program has not been accompanied by many specifics. Members and witnesses discussed issues of safety, workforce impacts, and the impact of the proposed changes on the future of the Nation's human space flight program.

Additionally in the budget request, the Administration has called for the Constellation program's termination and the initiation of closeout activities. Constellation is the human space flight development program established to deliver Americans to the International Space Station and later to the Moon and other destinations in the solar system following the retirement of the Space Shuttle.

"In cancelling this program, we would write off \$14 billion in taxpayer dollars that have been spent, with no apparent plan to make any significant use of the results of that investment. We would make this country dependent on yet-to-be developed "commercial crew" services of unknown cost and safety, with no government-backup system available; we would very likely be forced to rely on other nations to access low Earth orbit and the International Space Station for the foreseeable future. We would be left without a concrete plan, destination, or timetable for exploration missions beyond LEO. Additionally, this cancellation would negatively impact the nation's defense industrial base and would eliminate the program that would ease the transition for the Space Shuttle workforce and help retain key human space flight skills and industrial capabilities needed for the future," **stated Giffords**.

Members and witnesses also discussed issues associated with the proposal to rely solely on as yet to be developed commercial crew services. Members sought answers on the cost of such an approach, the risks that it would entail, and what recourse the government will have if the providers are unable to meet cost commitments or safety concerns.

"I want to see a plan that includes human exploration beyond low Earth orbit by the end of this decade. Nothing in this budget gives any indication that this would occur, and I find that unacceptable. We have the technology. Let's make it happen," **stated Giffords**.

For more information on the Committee's work on [NASA](#) and [Space](#), visit the Committee's [website](#).

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